

Foreign Service Spouse Series

CYNTHIA CHARD

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

Interview date: April 26, 1990

Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on April 26, 1990. I am interviewing Cynthia Chard at her home. I've come to talk to her about her establishing the Skills Bank in the mid-1970s.

Please, let's start with the quote that you've just cited about the 1972 Directive. You were in Katmandu in 1972 and your Ambassador said: ...

CHARD: And, in fact, he wrote on the cable as he sent it around for everybody to see, that it was "much ado about nothing."

Q: How did you interpret that? Was he saying that nothing is going to change?

CHARD: I don't think that he perceived it as anything important.

Q: I don't think many of the officers did. I don't think they realized the full implication. Do you agree?

CHARD: No, exactly.

Q: When you were in Washington in 1970-71, were you at all involved in any of the early - happenings, I'll call them, that preceded the '72 Directive?

CHARD: No. Not at all. At the time I was very much involved in my own career and studies. I was studying Art History in graduate school. Then Ken joined the Foreign Service and shortly thereafter we were assigned to Brussels.

Q: Oh, so you did not come to Washington to join the Foreign Service?

CHARD: No, We were already in Washington. Ken was working here.

Q: So you really didn't have any role to play in those early days. I notice that you were a member of the Women's Action Organization [WAO]. When was that?

CHARD: 1975. I must say, I'm very pleased to be able to do this interview because it's the first opportunity I've had to talk about the Skills Bank and who was involved and what happened with the Bank. Somehow, it has become - even though I cooperated and worked with the Forum Group - it was not an AAFSW project, it was under the Women's Action Organization and the Research Committee on Spouses.

The proposal to create the Skills Bank was presented to AAFSW. I didn't present it, others did on my behalf; and AAFSW was not interested in it. The whole area was too difficult to deal with, they didn't see it as a priority, and there were those of us on the Research Committee for Spouses who felt that it was an important issue. Having ourselves dealt with it, we felt there were things to be done by the Department, at minimal cost if any, that would make a happier Foreign Service couple.

Q: So you really were a member of the Research Committee on Spouses. You belonged to the Women's Action Organization. And you were employed at State at the time?

CHARD: Oh no. I worked on the Skills Bank as a volunteer.

Q: And what was your work at the time?

CHARD: (laughing) The Skills Bank. I was doing some escort interpreting as time permitted but once I developed the proposal and it began - I mean, that was a tremendous mailing, the first one.

Q: So that was 1975-78, when you did the Skills Bank. What prompted you to realize the need for it? I'm trying to fill in some background here, because it was obviously a thing that needed to be done. What was the impetus?

CHARD: Well, after returning from Cotonou, I had to face reentering the job market again. Having no information, no assistance - but let me back up: even when we were in Brussels and getting ready to go to Cotonou, the reports we were getting were somewhat bizarre. It was a "savage place," my husband was told not even to bring me at first until he could settle in because the hotels weren't great and so forth. In fact I had plans to do some research products and study in Brussels, but I decided that I would go to Cotonou to find out what we were getting into. I was going to be spending at least the next two years of my life there, and I wanted to find out what we were getting into.

I had arranged with my professors at the university in Brussels to continue my studies, sort of as a backup, but once I got to Cotonou I found that a career in medieval art history wasn't going to be that saleable the world over. Fortunately, the post had a wonderful Public Affairs Officer, who came to me and said that there were four geology students who needed to be taught English and would I be willing to do this on a contract basis. I said yes, I would love to. So that was the beginning of what ended up changing, sort of, the direction of my life. Because I did want to work and have a career. Even in the Foreign Service context.

Q: And so there was a job available.

CHARD: That job was available. And then, with the PAO's concurrence and support, I proposed setting up an English-teaching program for all of the top-ranking officials from all the different Ministries, because about a month after we arrived there was a coup, and the new government wanted to diminish its relations with France and look towards its neighbor to the east, Nigeria, where they speak English.

So I submitted a proposal to set up an English-teaching program, and at the same time met with various Ministries. It turned out to be one of the largest English-teaching programs. Eventually I hired eight instructors, and so forth.

Q: So you realized the potential for spouse employment.

CHARD: Exactly. But it would have been nice to have had some information about the possibilities even before I got there. I must say, it was sort of scary. Ken at least knew what he was going to be doing, but there were two years in front of me that I didn't know what was available, what was possible. And I was very new to the Foreign Service and to life overseas, particularly in a developing country. So I had no clue as to what was possible.

Q: I don't think anyone else did either at the time. I think that's why you hadn't gotten any instruction, really.

CHARD: Well, I think that they had seminars for teaching English overseas, for an example. By that time we were in Brussels, and we came back for a short consultation. I mean, there just wasn't any information on what possibilities existed and no sharing. Then, when I came back from Cotonou, looking at what I was going to do, I realized that there were more Foreign Service spouses in the same situation. I knew we were qualified, I knew there was a variety of skills among us; and I was even seriously thinking of setting up a company to do consulting. Another thing I had discovered when we were in Cotonou was that AID or other U.S. Government agencies would hire, on contract, people in the States when there were qualified people at post. To me that seemed like a waste of money.

Q: What other spouse possibilities did you see while you were in Cotonou?

CHARD: I also managed the commissary, took over that operation, and co-developed the first health insurance for the foreign nationals who were on contract. I also managed their contract. I helped set up the first employees' credit union in the country. The 10 percent markup on goods in the commissary provided a pool of money, and I provided training for any of the foreign nationals who were on contract.

Q: What kind of training?

CHARD: Some of the drivers wanted to learn typing, accounting. All they had to do was simply give me a request, saying what training they wanted, and we were able to provide it. It was fantastic. It did so much for morale, but we then had better employees. If one of the secretaries or the receptionist fell ill, we could fill in. And it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed that.

Q: This seems a long way from medieval art history.

CHARD: (laughing) Exactly!

Q: Did you get your minor in business? (both laugh)

CHARD: No, not at all. My formal studies were in international relations, political science. But it was the arriving in Cotonou, worrying about what I was going to be doing, and what contribution I could make in the two years, a bit afraid, but very anxious to do something. Luck had it that the circumstances were right and I saw some opportunities and took advantage.

That was one of the things that I envisioned with the Skills Bank: then we would have on file, for example, a record of what people did, and be able to give other people ideas.

Q: When you came back, how did you go about putting the Skills Bank together? You approached AAFSW, with no success. Then did you go to WAO? How did you...?

CHARD: WAO was very interested in spouse concerns and the Research Committee on Spouses was created and I got called into a meeting. In fact, Stephanie Kinney, or perhaps it was Hope Meyers, called and asked me if I would help distribute some forms for the first study that was being done, which Stephanie Kinney did. Again, through the Research Committee on Spouses.

Q: That was more comprehensive than just jobs, wasn't it. That was something to fill the gap after the perceived breakdown in community relations at posts after '72. Is that right?

CHARD: Well, it was more to begin to address the issue that spouses were more interested in career opportunities, not just jobs. It's very hard to have a career, but as I've seen in my case, I haven't been a Foreign Service Officer in that context, but I still have been able, with different experiences - and there were times I never thought it would come together, with bits and pieces here and there. But I must say now it really has come together. I can look back and feel a certain pride and confidence that over the years there has been a progression, an increase in responsibility, money amounts that I've handled in terms of contracts, and so forth. So it is possible to have a career.

Q: Did you finally get a contract to set up the Skills Bank? The financing had to come from somewhere, didn't it?

CHARD: No. The initial funding for the Skills Bank was - two of us, Hope Meyers and I, put in our own money. That was to cover the cost of printing the questionnaire and postage. Without Hope's very generous contribution it would have been very difficult to do.

Q: After the forms were printed and you had sent out - what was it? 4,672?

CHARD: That was just the first mailing to State. Let me go back a step. In December 1975 I pulled together the proposal to create - I think it was called "The Spouse Skills Inventory." [Fenzi says she has a copy.] So I developed the proposal, which was then presented to the Director General. In the interim it had been presented to AAFSW. They were not interested in it; it was just sort of an outgrowth of activities within the Research Committee, although I did take it before the WAO board, presented it to them, and got their official approval on it before we ever mailed out any of the questionnaires.

Before that we had submitted it to the Director General, Carol Laise. She called a meeting in January or February 1976. Now, even though I had written the proposal I was not invited to the meeting. She just decided that she would determine who would attend that meeting and I was not one.

Q: The Skills Bank was the first mailing.

CHARD: Yes, and it occurred several months before the Forum Project went out with their questionnaire.

Q: I remember the first Forum meeting, in November 1976. I didn't go because we were house-hunting and I had found a house for my husband to look at, and of course he could only go on weekends. By then you had been working on the Skills Bank ...

CHARD: For almost a year before she called the January or February '76 meeting. What really pushed me to go ahead was that once the proposal had been submitted to Carol Laise, and she had rejected it ...

Q: This was the original Skills Bank proposal or the original Forum proposal?

CHARD: This was the Skills Bank proposal; she had rejected the first Skills Bank proposal. In it I think I had requested an amount of 50 cents per spouse, making it low enough so that the Department couldn't come back and say it's much too expensive, but also making it ludicrously low so that if they did reject it, they would look foolish. But in the interim after the rejection, Ambassador Laise and her assistant Sue Whitman did invite several people to come in and talk to them. They were sort of interested in talking but not doing much.

Throughout that period I realized what a mammoth undertaking it would be, and I was hoping that the Department would see that it really was in their best interest to do the project. And there were discussions and I was finally brought in to some of them near the end. In the interim I had begun working on developing the Skills Bank form itself. It was interesting because I met with personnel specialists in the Department, with people at the (then) Civil Service Commission, because I was hoping to design a form that could be used by other Government agencies. I also met with some private personnel firms to see what kind of information and how to structure it. So I was doing all of that work meanwhile, hoping the Department would take it over and do it, but also realizing that perhaps they wouldn't.

Two things came into the final push: There was the Department, which was saying spouses aren't interested in careers, or working; and if they are, they're certainly not qualified in any areas that we could possibly use. Those were fighting words! (she laughs)

Q: Who did that come from? From Ambassador Laise's office?

CHARD: From many people. It was never said officially but it was said unofficially to me. That was just unacceptable. Plus, as long as the Department had no statistics, they could continue to say, well, there are just a few perhaps uppity women who're interested in careers and they're certainly not speaking for the majority of the Foreign Service and it's really not a problem. And that's why, in fact the first proposal was called, I think, a "skills inventory": it wasn't even called a Skills Bank. [Fenzi confirms this is her recollection.]

At that point I just wanted to document that there was an interest in career opportunities for spouses. The other was that there was an FSO-I at the time who was working in Personnel and who said he would give me a list of the names and addresses of all married Foreign Service personnel in State. I could have obtained that information by filing through the Freedom of Information Act, but his offer saved probably four or five months' work for us. So I received a computer printout, which I recall dividing up among whatever volunteers I could find, along with the gummed address labels. People would tear off sections and work whenever they could.

All of this was still while the Department, through Ambassador Laise, was saying yes, we will do a skills inventory. But her idea was that it would be done at post, it would be voluntary; and, again, the information would be kept at post, not available to people returning to Washington before their reassignment, or departing on assignment from there. Plus, if the information was always at post, again there were no statistics.

Q: And useless, too.

CHARD: And useless. So that was totally unacceptable, and I remember finally deciding at the end of April - now, the discussions had been going on since January 1976 to essentially the end of April. Ken and I took off for vacation. I had distributed the computer printouts and address labels. We came back from vacation; the labels were all done. We continued to talk to the Department up until the 1st of June. Then it was quite obvious they were not going to do anything. Ambassador Laise did say she was going to send a cable, suggesting the post might want to do a skills bank at post.

Q: So she had come around that far, anyway.

CHARD: Yes. But I think that was only in response to try to prevent our going ahead in the Department.

Q: She was tossing you a crumb.

CHARD: Exactly. That's sort of how we felt. At that point we decided, okay, it's now or never.

Q: You and Hope were doing this still?

CHARD: Hope had other commitments at that time, but she was helping as best she could. At that point, when it came to signing the letter, there was no one else in the Research Committee who wanted to sign the letter. Which I found rather fascinating, because there were a lot of good people and they were right up there, but when push came to shove no one wanted to sign that letter.

Q: Career vulnerability!(laughter)

CHARD: For whatever reason. So I said, well, I'll be very happy to sign it, it's my idea. So I signed the cover letter that was attached to the Skills Bank form. That was the 1st of June, 1976, I think. Shortly thereafter, 4,672 questionnaires went out to State. At that point I realized it had to be broken down. It was such a mammoth undertaking, to begin with. But also I anticipated that once we were able to show what had happened, and the response to it, then USIA and AID would come forth and be very helpful. In fact they were very easy, very cooperative. USIA and I believe AID also even printed out the names on computer labels for us. There were little things like that.

But there was - it was surprising - tremendous support among many employees in the Department. The fact that I was meeting with people in Personnel, designing the questionnaire, meeting with people in ISO so that it could be computerized; and that was all worked into the design of the form. Here employee time was being spent on it, yet the Department was saying no, we don't want to have anything to do with it. At one point I also asked for an office in the Department. Of course that was rejected, and yet where my husband was then working then, several of his bosses were very supportive and even said, "We'll let you use an office until ... " but I said no. I mean I really appreciated the gesture but it was risking exposure of all of us that could jeopardize the project. It was funny to see how many people supported the project, yet official policy was "No, we can't do it."

Q: So, after the official mailing went out - I remember filling out the form - and then came back to you, where did you go from there? How many of the 4,000-plus forms were responded to?

CHARD: Very quickly, within about a two-month period, I had a greater than 10 percent response. According to statistics for a blind mailing like that - not very many people knew of the Research Committee on Spouses, few more knew WAO - a two-page questionnaire, detailed, asking for the same information as a Form 171 or a CV, and a \$3 contribution fee to handle expenses up until a time when we hoped the Department would take it over. Even the Department was very impressed at the rate of return. People in Personnel were astounded, because at the same time they were doing a career book of Officers, I forget the title, it's referred to as the "stud book" and had bio-data of FSOs. But the project was terminated because not enough people responded.

Q: Oh, this was the Biographic Register, which I've heard referred to as the stud book. That was classified in '75, I believe it was.

CHARD: They discontinued it because they would have had to get permission from everybody to put that information together and they couldn't get people to respond to the forms. So they were just astounded by our 10 percent response. Of course I was keeping the Director General's office informed of the project's progress, but there still was no interest in meeting with me or in discussing the Skills Bank. So in August I decided to go to the press. I went to the Washington Post - just blindly called up and said, "I think I have an exclusive." The person there said, "There's no question, you definitely have a wonderful story but we don't know in our bureaucracy where to put it. It doesn't quite fit under Style, it doesn't quite fit under Metro, although there are aspects that would put it there. It's not quite International news. We don't know what to do with it." So I was given the name of a reporter at the Washington Star. I said, "I'll give you an exclusive. I have a few conditions if I give you an exclusive. I had trouble getting into the Department and I need some answers. If you will ask -" and I developed a list of questions to be presented to Ambassador Laise as to why the Department was uninterested.

[Interference on tape, obscuring voice.]

...and presented what I had in statistics at that point. Also, I had contacted MED, the Medical department, and they were very interested in finding people who had medical skills. In fact they were one of the first to use the Skills Bank. So it was curious we didn't have official support, and yet there was a department within State that was coming and using the Skills.

Q: Were you still running the Skills Bank from your dining room table at that point?

CHARD: Oh yes.

Q: You were living on Capitol Hill, and you actually went to Congress as a private individual presenting a legislative change for the Department of State and were successful? (both laugh)Marvelous, absolutely marvelous.

CHARD: I must say, looking back at the Skills Bank, it was tremendously lonely at times fighting the Department, and not very rewarding in my official dealings with the Department. But I must say, working with the Hill and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was absolutely fantastic. It was definitely the highlight of the whole project. To see how they got things done, things that would have taken me years to research in terms of the legal authority of, say, the Ambassador in a country over Americans, be they employees or the dependent spouses.

One of the responses that Ambassador Laise made when she turned down the proposal - I still haven't reached that point in my narrative - was that the Department [she reads from a document]: "During the 2-1/2- hour meeting, Director General Carol Laise made the following points: In this period of financial stringency, the Department must of necessity confine its efforts to employees. But wives in the system will receive attention as employees. Those who are private persons are not employees, should not expect the Department to act as more than a facilitator in solving their concerns. The Department recognizes the extent of national restrictions on the employment of diplomatic dependents, including those of the U.S. Government, but since such restrictions here and abroad are usually governed by legislation, ultimately they are susceptible to change only by citizen action. 3. Until wives agree among themselves on a cohesive program and recommendations and on a person or organization to act as an authoritative voice for all wives, the Department cannot be expected to respond effectively to suggestions made otherwise."

What she was telling us was that we needed FLO, right? (both laugh) What she was saying, and correctly, was that unless there was congressional authorization for appropriations, the Department could not expend money. Now, someone could have interpreted that - as she said, they could provide facilitative assistance, they could have seen the Skills Bank as facilitative assistance or information. They could justify under the morale of the Foreign Service, a number of ways. But legally, without an authorization, appropriated funds cannot be spent on non-employees.

So she gave me the keys - at that point I realized that there was a legal impediment that they could continue to use.

Q: Did you know that that had been sorted out in 1962 vis-a-vis spouse training? For five years, until 1960, Regina Blake was in charge of spouse training, and Harold Hoskins, who was then Director of the Foreign Service Institute, found unauthorized funds for her. I guess Congressman Rooney discovered it and stopped Mrs. Blake's program. Funds for Mary Vance Trent to start spouse training in 1962 had been authorized by Congress in 1960. So there was a precedent for that, Carol Laise had done her homework too.

CHARD: Exactly. So, as I said, [more interference] So with that I realized that in order for the Department to take it over, there did need to be authorizing legislation. So in working with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee [more interference] in November 1976, and then met with them throughout that period. One of the nice things was that the Hill could send down to the Department a number of questions as they began preparing for this legislation. So all of the questions concerning legal issues, and as Ambassador Laise was pointing out that... [Tape ends and some words are lost.]

In February 1976, five members of the WAO Research Committee on Spouses were invited to meet with Ambassador Laise. Those invited were Priscilla Becker, Stephanie Kinney, Hope Meyers, Anne Relph and Carmen Williams. Others present were Mary Buell, president of AAFSW, Pat Woodring of AFSA and Barbara Hoganson of FSI Family Workshop. Sue Wilson, wife of an Officer currently in JOT [junior officer training], and Dr. Frank Johnson, Bureau of Medical Sciences were invited to the initial meeting to discuss the Skills Bank.

Q: Although you had set it up and submitted the proposal.

CHARD: Yes. I had written the proposal and yet I was not invited.

Q: Had you been to the press and Congress by that time?

CHARD: Heavens no, this was - again, I wrote the proposal in December 1975, then it was submitted to the Director General, who then called the meeting and invited those people to discuss the Skills thing, because those people were basically on the Research Committee of WAO. I was on the Research Committee and was not invited but I was just saying that those I've mentioned were some of the key players early on vis-a-vis the Research Committee. As I quoted Ambassador Laise's saying she wanted one person or one organization speaking for spouses, at that point basically the Research Committee on Spouses was prepared to speak for spouses. But I think there was a philosophy within the Department: "divide and conquer" and "we can point out that the women are not working together, and so we'll invite of course a representative from AAFSW." And because they were working with others, they also invited the AFSA representative.

AFSA was very concerned with what we were doing. In fact AFSA didn't sponsor or support the legislation which would have authorized the Department to institutionalize the Skills Bank and to change that regulation, also to provide additional training for all family members. Those were the three points in the legislation that I helped draft and then succeeded in getting passed. Because it was pointed out that in order to be competitive overseas in job markets, you had to speak the local language. I had examples to cite of spouses who had been denied language training overseas because the post budget had insufficient funds for it.

Initially, I was proposing that only spouses be authorized to have language training. But it was Senators McGovern and Humphrey, I think, who spoke up and said, "It should be all family members, anybody who wants language training to help them live and adapt in a foreign country should have access to it. Access should not be denied." They were wonderful supporters in expanding it. They also, I think, got rather annoyed with the Department: the Department's representative was always saying that they didn't feel the legislation was necessary. I can remember that even in conference when it came up and the Department's representative was asked, "How do you view this?" he replied, "We don't feel that it's necessary." At that point, Senator McGovern said, "Well, good! We do!" (both laugh) And it passed.

Q: I didn't realize how many people in the Department aren't aware of it. Do you think that it was from that meeting that Stephanie got busy on the AAFSW Forum? How did you get from that meeting and the Skills Bank to the Forum, which I presume was really the mechanism for getting FLO?

CHARD: I'm glad you point that out, because the legislative authorization for the Family Liaison Office is a result of the Skills Bank. Because it authorizes the Department to provide career assistance to spouses, and also to spend money on spouses. As long as the Skills Bank is part of the Family Liaison Office, that is the authorization legislation which is required by law.

I don't know if you know, but apparently there was a period when the FLO decided it didn't want the Skills Bank. The inspectors came in and asked, "Where is the Skills Bank?"

Q: Whose watch was that under?

CHARD: I don't know, because I turned it over to the Department and it was obvious that the Department didn't want me and they didn't want my ideas. It had been my project until that point. Yes, I was very closely tied to it, and I was fighting for it. I guess I had done the things the Department just didn't like - I'd gone to the press and I'd gone to the Hill ...

Q: Instead of working within the system.

CHARD: ... because the system wasn't working. That was obvious. Anyway, once I turned it over I walked away. I thought it's been three years of my life and I was happy to give them, but also at that point I was happy to walk away. The negotiations with me at the end were so distasteful that I was so glad just to be away from it. So I left. As I said, at no time has anyone in the Department ever come to me, yet I had three years' experience designing the program, developing it, and I had even made suggestions to the first group in the Family Liaison Office as to changes I would make.

Q: Did you ever receive any compensation for this?

CHARD: The State Department when I turned it over gave me \$3,000.

Q: One thousand dollars a year. (laughter)

CHARD: Well, let's just say it went to cover expenses.

Q: So the legislation authorizing funding for family members was really what enabled FLO to come into existence.

CHARD: Exactly.

Q: And when someone tried to take the Skills Bank out, they realized they'd lost the rationale for funding.

CHARD: And it was the inspectors who came in asking, "Where is the Skills Bank?" I think it was in the early 80s that it was dropped. I'm the first to say that it's a tremendous amount of work. I really didn't follow it. It was only at FLO's tenth anniversary celebration that someone came up to me, "Oh, did you know it was dropped? The inspectors when they began their inspection asked, 'Where is the Skills Bank?'" And the FLO said, "Oh, we no longer have it." And the inspectors said, "You will have, and maintain, a Skills Bank." So that is the authorization for the Department to spend the appropriation.

Q: Now, Lesley Dorman did a lot of testifying on the Hill? What was that about?

CHARD: That was later, after the initial legislation had already - I was the only one up on the Hill in November 1976. In August 1977, as you know, President Carter signed the legislation. When it was in conference, the Senate Foreign Relation Committee's small conference room was used and seats are at a premium. I was one of the few admitted from among the public.

Q: To back up, when did you turn the Skills Bank over to the Department?

CHARD: It was turned over with the creation of the Family Liaison Office in 1978.

Q: May I ask why it was distasteful - the negotiations for turning it over?

CHARD: Well, while it was in conference, the Department realized that it really didn't want the legislation. McGovern, Biden and I think possibly Percy joined in stating that they wanted the Department to report in six months what they had done concerning the provisions of the legislation, i.e., the Skills Bank, changing the regulation to provide language training to family members.

Q: As to what they had done, or what they were planning to do?

CHARD: To report on what they had done towards implementing the legislation. So, beginning in September 1978, the Department reported back that they wanted to consult with me and wanted to see how we would proceed. In that interim, I presented a new proposal for updating the Skills Bank. Because when I started it, and even in the cover letter, I said that it would be a pilot project that would go for a year. I may have said "till June 1977." So I was quite anxious for the Department to take it over, also to be able to respond to people who had sent their questionnaires.

That was another thing - in connection with the Skills Bank I had to be concerned about constant publicity, telling what I was doing to find jobs, to provide career counseling. I pulled together a packet of information on how to fill out your Form 171, and that people could write in to request the form. I kept the "Action News" of the WAO Newsletter constantly advised, and there was always an update on the Skills Bank. As my husband said, I was probably one of the most photographed non-employees to be featured in the Department's Newsletter, because that was another vehicle for publishing information on where the Skills Bank was, what we were finding, what we were doing.

There was a lot of apathy in the Department and people saying, "We're so thrilled to see some activity but what's going to happen with it? It's not just a useless exercise, is it?" That was a major concern. Also, contacting the different bureaus in the Department that were contracting, so that they could use the Skills Bank. As I said, MED was one of the first and most receptive. There were others.

Beginning in September 1977, the Department said, "Okay, we are interested" and called me in. I remember one meeting in which there were 12 individuals from different bureaus who were all brought together to work with me. I always was very careful in working with the Department, and I had asked for a secretary to do the Minutes of the meeting and I was assured there would be one. I arrived and discovered there was none, but fortunately I had a tape recorder and said, "I hope no one minds but since the Department among you 12 can't provide us with a secretary to take Minutes of these meetings, I'll just turn on the tape recorder." There was still quite a bit of opposition but my move basically silenced it.

Then I met with them individually, because I knew which bureaus and divisions were still against the Skills Bank. I became aware quite quickly that I didn't want the Skills Bank under the Director General, in Personnel. AFSA, in fighting the legislation, was saying through their representative on the Hill, "We don't even give career counseling to the employees; why should we give it to spouses?" AFSA's concern was that if the Skills Bank was under Personnel, would that affect assignments and how was that going to play? AFSA fought the legislation as well.

It was funny: the Hill wanted me to get AFSA support for it. The night before it was to be introduced in subcommittee, I went to the Hill and said, "I'm very sorry but I can't deliver AFSA's support for this legislation. But you're going to hear these comments concerning the legislation and why they don't support it." Because I was able to predict that, and it happened, again they were ready and they knew I knew what I was talking about, that I had done my homework. So at that point they said, "Well, we've done an awful lot of work on this." By that point, they had.

Another funny thing, again, the night before the legislation was to be introduced into subcommittee: the way the legislation was written, because of where it was placed in the Foreign Service Act, spouses received preference even over career employees. When I saw that, that's when I went up to the Hill and said, (laughing) "We've got to change this immediately." It was about 5 o'clock on a Thursday night when I got up there and found a copy; the bill was to be introduced Friday morning into subcommittee. Unfortunately, AFSA had been given an earlier draft. I knew they would be up in arms about the legislation and that we had to change it. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffers called up their legal counsel, saying, "We're sending up Cynthia Chard. She needs to have something changed on the Foreign Service Act. She has our authority to work with you. Please provide whatever is necessary."

So I had to convince them (laughing again) to stay after hours. Till about seven o'clock we worked on the wording and the placement in the legislation. About 7:30, I went to the Hill post office, made photocopies of it, and was back there at 8 o'clock to give it to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffers - briefing them as we walked down the hall to enter the committee room.

They said, "Describe what you've done in two sentences so that we can give it to Senators Biden and McGovern," the two who were sponsoring the legislation, "and tell them the changes." When AFSA arrived, not knowing that we had reworded the act and replaced it, their initial objections were already taken care of.(laughter)

Q: What a fascinating experience for you, really!

CHARD: As I said, it was really fun to work with the Hill. It just clicked. I mean, you can't waste time, you have to know what you're doing. And they went with it. At the point when, I believe, it was introduced into subcommittee, Senator Humphrey made some such comment as,[loud imitation of man's voice] "Gee, I don't know why we need that. My wife has never worked; she's never felt the need. I don't know what all this concern is all about." Of course he was the same Party as the men sponsoring, but I can remember McGovern and Biden speaking up to it.

Q: And Mrs. Humphrey took his seat in the Senate after he died, so he didn't know what he was talking about!(both laugh)

CHARD: It was pretty funny because a lot of us were saying, "She doesn't work? We know better." As I said, that was the fun part of it.

Q: So, you had a Skills Bank and no mechanism in the Department set up to take it or to put it into effect. Were you still working from your dining room table at this point?

CHARD: Oh yes. Up until it was turned over to the Family Liaison Office.

Q: It's absolutely extraordinary that Congress legislated funding for it when it was still in your dining room.

CHARD: Well, it was the authorization. I also knew that we needed funding. You first get authorization for funds to be spent, but then you have to go get the funds. I could have, easily; and there was that possibility of working to get the funds appropriated. I decided: no, I'm going to get the authorization, and then it's going to be the Department's problem to find the funds to do the project. Plus, it would have been additional work.

That legislation wasn't signed until August 1977. It specified that the Department had six months in which to begin activities towards implementation and they were to report back on that. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee I think was prepared to continue to put in language requiring them to report.

Q: So that's when Lesley came in to go up and tell them what had been done? Was that what her testimony was about?

CHARD: No, I think she didn't start testifying until after this piece of legislation. She was working with Pat Schroeder. Then, again, starting for the authorization for appropriations for the next year would have begun in November-December 1977 at the earliest. I then took over for AAFSW as their legislative person. I resigned that, I think, in March 1978. So up to that point AAFSW really wasn't doing much on the Hill. This may have served as an example that if you know and do your homework and present it, Congress is very sympathetic.

That's why it was also important when WAO decided to give me their award for having made "the most contribution to the Foreign Service." Initially when they said they were going to present it, I thanked them but said I alone couldn't take credit and wanted to share the award with Senators McGovern and Biden, because of their part in the legislation. WAO was amenable. And that was fun! (laughter) When the invitations went out, and everyone in the Department who'd been fighting the project learned that the Senators were coming, they - all - showed - up. (hearty laughter) From Ambassador Laise on down.

What happened actually was that there was major legislation pending and the Senators couldn't come, in the end. So a small group of us from WAO went up the next day and presented plaques to the two Senators. It was the first such award or recognition that Senator Biden had ever received and he brought his two young sons to be there for that presentation. He was the one who sponsored the legislation for the Skills Bank specifically, and McGovern was for the change in the regulation and the language training. Perhaps the most controversial aspect was sponsored by Senator Biden, the young "hard-charger." Anyway, that was fun.

Q: This all makes one realize how valuable the '72 Directive was, because if that had never passed, we would have anarchy in the Department, I really believe. It was a product of its time and it legally defined the status of the spouse.

CHARD: Well, having seen the Department and the fact that it doesn't budge, I have heard that part of the '72 Directive resulted from threat of a lawsuit to the Department.

Q: I've heard that too, just as a rumor, but I can't find documentation for that.

CHARD: It probably needs research but, again, I found that the Department wasn't willing to budge, and then from pressure initially from the press, then from the Hill, they then - this is why I'm so pleased with your Oral History Project. All of this would have been lost otherwise.

For the tenth anniversary celebration of the Family Liaison Office, I had a real problem with the history that they wrote. First of all, it didn't give WAO any recognition of the role they had played, and WAO was very significant.

Q: Because those women, being in the system, knew how to get things done. As far as I'm concerned, that's the whole key to getting things done in the Department.

CHARD: And I must say all of WAO's members and its board were helpful in volunteering and ready to help me write what needed to be written so the Department would understand it, and so forth.

And I learned a tremendous amount from being part of WAO and might not have been so successful without that assistance. And as I mentioned, my concern was that I didn't want the Skills Bank under the Director General. I had seen the resistance we'd gotten. In all due respect to Ambassador Laise, I know she was in a difficult position. Here, AFSA was fighting and concerned about what we were doing - that's why an AFSA representative was invited to meet with the spouses - and the Department already responded to AFSA that AFSA can't speak for spouses. Yet they were concerned as to what the Department was going to do. That's why early on I was pushing that it had to be under Management, not Personnel and the Director General's office.

By the way, WAO met - was continually meeting - with Management officials throughout this whole period. So what we were able to do with the Skills Bank was to make sure that the Skills Bank and our concerns were always presented to Management or the Director General. Whomever WAO was meeting with at the time, the Skills Bank was always included. But, as Ambassador Laise said, she wanted one organization to speak for spouses, and at the beginning AAFSW couldn't encompass the career needs and wishes. Again, it was "divide and conquer" and as long as we could be divided. A letter that Jean Vance and I of the AAFSW Forum project drafted, along with Priscilla Becker, then head of the Research Committee on Spouses, and myself as the spouse skills talent bank, sent to Ambassador Laise to say that the Skills Bank, and WAO working on the Skills Bank, were cooperating and participating in the Forum project as well.

Again, the Department was perfectly happy to say that, "Oh well, the wives can't agree on who should speak for them and their two organizations," and so on. My concern with the Skills Bank was that we weren't left out here. I had a significant number of responses, and I think there were approximately 1,100 people who had responded to the Skills Bank inquiry. So, I could know when I spoke for the Skills Bank, it was representing 1,100 spouses. Joan Pryce told me she was surprised that that many people responded. I think something like 1,700 spouses are in the Skills Bank today. Here I was, charging a \$3 participation fee, and so forth.

My concern was that I didn't want us, these 1,100, not to be incorporated into anything that the Department would see as us perhaps not working together. In fact we went on record to the effect that the Forum and the Research Committee on Spouse and the Spouse Skills Talent Bank "are working together to identify and analyze the concerns of Foreign Service spouses and families and to recommend possible action to the Department that the Department of State may wish to take with regard to these matters."

So I was, in effect, working with WAO and the Research Committee. At a certain point I was vice president on the WAO board [and on] the Research Committee, the Skills Bank, and the Forum project, so that the Skills Bank would be included in the Forum, and also my suggestions would also be incorporated into the final design. That's why I was so concerned that it be under Management rather than the Director General.

Q: So at that point we had the Skills Bank, we had the Research Committee on Spouses, and you were sort of bridging the two. You were also involved with WAO. And then there was the AAFSW Forum Committee.

CHARD: Right.

Q: So those all came together somewhere - right about now? (she laughs)

CHARD: Yes. So the concern was that no one could say that those who wanted career or jobs and career aspirations were not part of the mainstream.

Q: How, after all this resistance, did AAFSW then come to the fore? Because of Lesley Dorman?

CHARD: Lesley, as well as the organization at that point ...

Q: ... had changed just enough in four or five years.

CHARD: Exactly. I think Lesley deserves a lot of credit for that. She was willing to take on the Forum and go forth with it. When the Forum went out with its initial mailing, by that point I'd already had considerable response to the initial mailing; I think it was better than 10 percent. So I had already 400-some responses. Another interesting thing with the Skills Bank was that a letter came along with, say, every other questionnaire, telling what the writer's situation was at post, difficulties encountered, etc. All of that was important.

I called Lesley Dorman I think it was in August at about the same time I also contacted the journalist. I believe it was after the first Forum mailing went out that I told Lesley, "This is what I've received, it may be difficult in terms of dealing with it, but it is something that is a concern by a significant number of Foreign Service spouses." Then I was invited to join the Forum and be part of it. That was all very important.

Unfortunately, the Department and the FLO, when they celebrated FLO's tenth anniversary, didn't think to include WAO. To me that was a shame, because we all were working together. Whenever you can get different organizations to work together, maybe they have different perspectives and go at it from different angles, but there was no way that the Department was going to turn back. We weren't going to let them, now. Unfortunately WAO often doesn't get the recognition that it deserves.

Q: I think one thing we can do, which we've done before, is edit an article out of your interview for State News. We've now had six articles in it.

CHARD: Yes, I think it should. It's interesting because in the State Department's Newsletters - and fortunately the history of the Skills Bank is pretty well documented in the WAO Action Newsletter - But again if you don't have those, it is lost.

Q: When I went through the WAO files in Marguerite's garage - you're beautifully organized but those files, who knows where they've come from? So I don't know how many of the Action News copies I have that really have Skills Bank in them.

CHARD: I can provide you with those.

Q: What makes the Skills Bank form complicated? I remember filling it out and don't recall running into anything I couldn't handle.

CHARD: No. It just takes time. In matching up your experience within the various classifications and categories. But I realize that that's all very necessary to get it down.

Q: Could someone go to the FLO office and get help filling out their Skills form?

CHARD: I'm sure they can, although I don't speak for FLO. But any form in which you're setting down ...

Q: It's a good self-inventory for someone who's job-hunting.

CHARD: Yes, and it's a good start. Even as I was providing career counseling during the operation of the Skills talent bank while I was with it, the Form 171 is the best place to start in terms of doing a CV or a resume. How you write it and do it is so important.

Q: I think it hasn't occurred to either of us, because we're both familiar with it, but we really need to tell, in your interview so that we can excerpt it for an article, just exactly what is the Skills Bank? How does it work? What does the spouse have to do to get into it?

CHARD: I think that would better be asked to Joan Pryce. What's interesting is that I've gone back, as my husband and I anticipate another overseas assignment, as a spouse to the FLO ten, eleven years after its creation, and I must say that it was so wonderful to go back because one of the things that they have is the "six-month update from post" as to who's working, which firms they're working or volunteering with, what people are doing, the number of spouses who are looking for employment, the number who are employed. That was one of the things that I saw with the Skills Bank - that it would provide us with information on what was available at post. So you could begin thinking way before you arrived what were your possibilities, what people were doing now, were there any possibilities of picking up when someone moves out - things like that.

It's available now. That's really exciting. And Joan spent some time with me and provided me with sort of an update on the skills thing. Plus, she didn't know much of the history, so I was filling her in as best I could on dates and so forth.

Q: Did you take notes on what she said? Or was it just verbal?

CHARD: It was just verbal.

Q: Because I'm envisioning an article on the history of the Skills Bank from your interview. And then a box with Joan Pryce quoted on where it is today and what a spouse should do to participate in it. And see if the Skills Bank gets any impetus from publicity like that.

CHARD: Well, another thing that I envisioned with the Skills Bank, [the] Newsletter, each month, could do a few paragraphs highlighting what one spouse has done, wherever.

Q: The Newsletter would do more of that, I'm sure. They've been very receptive to our material.

When you signed the Skills Bank letter - you take it from there.

CHARD: It was relatively at the beginning of Ken's career in the Department when I decided to undertake the Skills Bank. But fortunately Ken has always been a fighter himself and he championed the whole project all of the way. What was interesting is, he was touched by the project, and what hit him the most were the letters that I was getting.

Q: Hit him the most in which way?

CHARD: ... Struck him. I got a lot of letters from people who had been with the Department 20 and more years, and they were the spouses who were perhaps the most vocal in saying "Bravo! We need this. I wish something had been done, and all I have to show for my 20-some years is very little, is nothing."

Q: Representation vouchers.

CHARD: (laughing) Not even there ...

Q: The husband's representation vouchers!

CHARD: Exactly. Or good reports in the husband's Efficiency Report.

Q: Or not so good.

CHARD: Exactly. He was really struck by that, in terms of the fact that the Department didn't seem to care.

Q: He was moved, in other words, by the response that you had elicited from women much senior to you at that point.

CHARD: But the other thing was, his people in the then-CUAF, the Cultural Affairs for Africa, were the ones who were saying they were going to give me office space. I had found a job for one of the spouses, and it was so wonderful because her husband came in and commented to me that after she had returned to Washington and finally I had helped to get her a job, she was a totally different person. The realization on his part of seeing it. And then the other thing that Ken recognized was that when we would be invited to different Embassy parties, people knew me because there had been enough in the newspapers and so forth and people were anxious to meet Cynthia Chard. And there were many occasions where people came up to Ken, and would say, "Oh, you're Cynthia Chard's husband!" (both laugh heartily) He came home from one of those parties and said, "You know, I never realized what it was like to be known simply as the spouse of somebody. Not to have your own identity, not to have people interested in finding out who you are or were or what you had done but what your spouse had done."

Q: And judging you accordingly.

CHARD: Exactly. He came back and said, "I don't think there are many employees in the Department who have a realization of what it must be like." And he added, "I only experienced it occasionally at these receptions, not through an entire lifetime."

Q: You're just giving me the opening paragraph of the article on your interview. We'll work in from there.

CHARD: (laughing) Okay. But it is hard to be known as the dependent of anybody. No matter how much you love your husband, or wife, being a dependent spouse was very difficult.

Q: But it says a great deal about the relationship between Ken and you that he was willing - you were going to talk about signing the letter that no one else would sign.

CHARD: And I have a feeling that other people felt more vulnerable and weren't willing to make that step. I made some statement about the purpose of the Skills Bank was to prove that we weren't cookie-pushers. And I felt it was really important. One thing I would like to see the Skills Bank do, and in which I even was at fault for not doing, was doing a final tabulation of: Okay, we have X numbers of doctors, architects, etc.

Q: Oh, they should.

CHARD: It should. I did some preliminary count. When I finally turned over the Skills Bank, from September '77, after the legislation was passed and signed [by] the President and had become law, then the Department started talking to me, and even reported to the Hill, that they were going to contract with me to update and computerize the Skills Bank. Which was at that point what I was hoping for.

So I began negotiations. As I said, they were long, protracted, very, very difficult because the Department really didn't want to go ahead with the Skills Bank.

Q: Can we go back to your discussion with Ken when you were embarking on this? You were meeting with resistance in the Department.

CHARD: He knew there was resistance but he said, "Go for it." All along he championed - and I'm not sure that we ever so much as sat down and really discussed it.

Q: "If I do this, will such-and-such happen to you ..."

CHARD: Precisely. It wasn't to that point. When I first developed the proposal he said, "Oh, this is a wonderful idea." He had lived through the experience of me not knowing any information about what I would find in Cotonou and felt that there was information that would not cost the Department a great deal of money to provide.

But it was the English teaching program - the people I met were the people who became our friends and who still, to this day - in fact, I have four Benin godchildren (laughing) as a result of the friendships we developed. So that gave us an opportunity to meet others that weren't in the normal Embassy circuit. It was a fabulous two years. But we found that throughout Ken's career it's basically been the friends we have met through what I have been doing that gave us a greater entrée into the country and an understanding of what was going on, and our friendships that have lasted throughout time.

Whatever the spouse is doing does contribute greatly. I mean that I know I was an equal representative of the U.S. Government of the American way of life overseas, and it makes sense if both of us are happy. He's going to be a better employee as well. As I said, I thought these things then, and I'm pleased to see that the Department has done some things, but there are still others that can be done.

Q: But that's why I think that the '72 Directive really only addressed half of the issue. Creating a legal status for the spouse - making her a private individual - was important.

CHARD: Oh yes; that was essential.

Q: But what the '72 Directive did not do was pick up the pieces of what the spouse does and would continue to do as a private individual, for no recognition, no financial compensation - "psychic income" a very over-used term. No one has ever addressed that. If some awareness could come out of this Oral History Project to make the Department aware of that ...

CHARD: There is one thing that I feel would address that. The Swedish Foreign Service has done it. They provide pensions. As I reach close to Ken's retirement, and he's selected to take early retirement - which I must say we're looking forward to - I think it will probably be March 1992. But as I approach that, I'm reaching a point where it would be nice to have had a pension. The problem of not having a career with one organization is that I don't have the pension. And what an excellent way! I think there would even be ways that the Department could proceed to provide a pension or even some authorization by Congress to let the spouse set up an independent Keogh or a IRA or a something - which wouldn't even cost the Department. It would be just the opportunity to set up such an account like that, for example.

Q: So save on taxes, in other words.

CHARD: Exactly. But we don't even have that option. And for the senior wives, as I said, with the project I heard a lot from women who had been in and they had contributed and they had done the representational duties and were still doing them. And had absolutely nothing to show for it. This would be one way that the Department could provide recognition for that contribution.

Q: A former director of FLO whom I interviewed said that probably Social Security or some sort of pension is the only way that spouses are going to get any compensation for the time being.

CHARD: There are hardship posts where you get a differential. The pension for the spouse could be part of that differential in serving overseas. I know there's been the Foreign Service Associates Project and an attempt to pay Foreign Service spouses. That's all very difficult and complicated in getting acceptance, because there are the Congressional [wives] who give ...

Q: There's no mechanism in place to put it into effect.

CHARD: Exactly. And how do you justify paying the Foreign Service spouse and why should she get it, and so forth. But there is one thing that's different with the Foreign Service spouse as opposed to a Congressional wife: at least the latter is here in the States. The Foreign Service spouse, in accompanying wife or husband, ends up going overseas; and so, even if you were a spouse in the States, the avenues for remaining connected with career and associations and so on are severed. So there is a unique difference in being overseas and serving overseas, and there should be some recognition. I think the pension is a wonderful idea.

Q: The other thing about the Congressional wives is that incumbents tend to be reelected, so many of those wives have been here in Washington for years and years and years. And because they are Congressional wives, there are all sorts of people who want to hire them. Whereas with Foreign Service wives, who cares whether we're here in Washington or not? Because we have no clout ...

CHARD: Exactly. And how long are you going to be here, anyway? Yes, we've encountered that. When Ken was assigned to Algiers, I had just accepted a new job. So I was asked what happens when your husband is transferred overseas? I said, "I will give you a two-year commitment," which is the normal time that a person - I was able to come up with this statistic - remains in a job in the U.S. So I said, "I will give you a two-year commitment, with two caveats: unless you do something I can't accept, or unless I get an offer I can't refuse. I don't anticipate either." So Ken was off to Algiers and I was beginning a new job in Washington. He was in Algiers for two years before I was able to join him.

Q: But then you went over and became Commercial Officer.

CHARD: Yes.

Q: How did you manage that?

CHARD: That was delightful. I really enjoyed the opportunity, and loved working with Commerce and loved being in a situation where I was trying to match Algeria's development needs with U.S. exports, and helping Americans penetrate that market. I must say I felt very rewarded and can point to specific examples where I as an individual serving in that role did make a difference. Once I saved a contract - I think it was in the amount of \$80 million - just because I had set up a system to monitor what companies had contracts pending and negotiations on the table; and called the Algerian State Corporation and asked if they had received everything from the company, and they hadn't. So I contacted the company, which was able to give the documentation. That was during the first couple of months - a wonderful start. (both laugh heartily)

I then went on to develop a project where we introduced irrigation equipment, all different types, into ten different regions in Algeria under one of the biggest major-product opportunities, which was reserved exclusively for U.S. firms.

Q: Were you able to arrange that position here in Washington before you went over or was it just vacant when you arrived at post?

CHARD: The Ambassador in fact was anxious to have me at post, as Ken was. I said, "I'm very sorry but if there isn't anything substantive for me to do, I won't and can't leave my job." So the Ambassador suggested I apply through Commerce, which at that point were just setting up their Foreign Commercial Service. I applied, and in the interim Secretary Baldrige was taking a trade investment mission to Algeria, and the Ambassador and the then commercial attaché^{1/2} pushed to have me come out as a consultant to pull together that project.

Of course Commerce had some of their own people they wanted to send out, but the Ambassador and the commercial attaché prevailed. So I went out two and a half weeks before the trade investment mission and coordinated the whole program. Baldrige and people in Commerce who accompanied him were so impressed with what I had done - and I must say, we had no computers, we didn't get the confirmation of the approximate 100 meetings we had requested until 9 o'clock the evening after the delegation arrived. They came in around noon. There were 34 corporate executives, mostly presidents and chairmen. It read like a Who's Who of corporate America. These are people who aren't used to having to wait for their schedule (hearty laughter). They want it NOW.

We had no computers in the Embassy. I had a personal computer but it hadn't dawned on me to take it overseas. I literally organized the Embassy and the secretarial pool and hired some people on contract. As I said, there were over 100 meetings, and although they were group meetings for the businessmen, no two people had the same schedule. So we were literally cutting and pasting. But everybody had their individual schedule, and there were several master schedules that everyone could check. They were ready by 7 a.m., put under everybody's door at the hotel. It was an all night effort! But it worked, and it worked well.

Then Commerce was anxious to have somebody able to provide follow through. I had attended some of the meetings, so it was sort of logical to give me a limited appointment - thinking that a career appointment would come through. Because I had submitted my application and had passed the initial screening, then I was to take the oral. I took it the day after I came back to Washington with Secretary Baldrige in his private plane, jet lagging and not knowing what would happen.

It all went well. I did very well on the oral. Everyone thought I was a shoo-in, since I had coordinated the corporate visit and could provide follow-through to the firms. There was a great deal of effort to get me out to post, so they came through and said, "We'll give you a limited appointment, anticipating that we'll be able to give you a career appointment." Well, when they did the final analysis - which involved giving so many points for your past experience, your oral, and another category, "previous business experience" - when they weighed all these together, they issued a rank ordering. I was a third or fourth alternate. I didn't have any previous business experience. My experience had been with nonprofit organizations, not the business world. So I never was offered a career appointment but served the two years under limited appointment.

Later, twice while I was at post, I took the Foreign Service Commercial test - and didn't pass the test! (both laugh heartily) Yet I got two major incentive awards while I was at post. The first one was six months after I'd arrived. I came in with the cable to Ken and said, "Look at this." He said, "I don't believe it, they've made an error; nobody gets any type of incentive award after only six months on the job." But I obviously was able to do the job and was doing quite well. Still later, a very nice cash award, \$2,300. Again, (laughing) Ken just couldn't believe it.

Q: Had you never thought of taking the Foreign Service exam?

CHARD: Oh, I had taken it and didn't pass it. I even applied to the Mid-Level Entry program and was successful until the oral interview but failed that.

Q: International relations was your background, too.

CHARD: (laughing) Yes. I obviously couldn't pass tests.

Q: And how many women were they taking at that time, too?

CHARD: Well, during my service to WAO I can remember speaking out very eloquently in a board meeting that WAO join as a plaintiff in a suit against the Department of State. I was part of that board that made the decision that WAO would join the suit. I felt absolutely essential.

Q: The one person involved with WAO whose career did not seem to suffer was Mary Olmsted. She must have done a marvelous balancing act.

CHARD: Yes. Well, it was interesting: I'll never forget that board meeting because there were a lot of people on the board who were very afraid of taking that action; they wanted to work within the system. As I had seen, the system wasn't very responsive and they do respond when there's outside pressure. A suit is one way, the press and the Hill are other ways. And WAO throughout its history has greatly contributed to advancing the cause of women in the Foreign Service and made it a more representative foreign service.

Q: Even before the AAFSW Forum report, WAO was meeting with the Department ...

CHARD: With management and the Director General, and at all times they always incorporated information on spouse concerns. Early in 1977 and prior to AAFSW's Forum report, WAO prepared a report and recommendations for the incoming Secretary, which included creation of an office to deal with family concerns, reporting directly to the Under Secretary for Management with primary responsibility the assumption of all skills and talent bank functions.

That's just another example of what a contribution WAO had with the creation of the Family Liaison Office, from the beginning of the Research Committee on Spouses, all the way through and up until the creation of the Family Liaison Office. And I must say, I was most disappointed that WAO wasn't given sort of an equal recognition at the 10th anniversary of the Family Liaison Office. In fact, even on the second page of the Forum report there's something to the effect that WAO "supports and agrees with all of the recommendations."

Again, the two organizations were speaking and addressing the concerns of Foreign Service spouses with every possible official that we could. This is to quote, now, from the history that came out of the Family Liaison Office for the 10th anniversary: "During the 70s, the Department of State recognized the necessity of addressing the special concerns of the foreign affairs community, particularly those related to spouses and other family members. Department leadership realized that the impact of Foreign Service life on families was adversely affecting the morale, efficiency and career commitment of employees. Therefore, leadership was responsive to [the] AAFSW Forum report."

Well, I would just like to state for the record that it took a tremendous amount of effort. I wouldn't say that the Department leadership realized the impact or recognized the concerns, and it was only through the efforts of all of us - the Research on Spouses, WAO, AAFSW and all of the women who may not even have been members of those organizations but who called and contacted me. Over 40 people volunteered to work on the Skills Bank. That was tremendous: I mean, the amount of time, effort and energy and commitment. We were pushing; and it was only through pushing and, as I said, the outside influence of the press and the Hill that came through and helped the Department realize.

One of the things the Department also did was their saying that because of the nature of diplomatic immunity, spouses could not be given and would not be permitted to work. The response to that was we would need bilateral agreements. This came out in the questions that I drafted that went from the Hill back to the State Department preparing for the authorization legislation. And that was one of the responses - that we would need bilateral agreements with the various countries to permit spouses to work.

So the Hill said, "Why aren't you doing it then?" back to the State Department. And in fact the legislation concerning the Skills Bank included a provision, Part 3: "...otherwise assist such spouses in obtaining overseas employment." That was the blanket we needed to push the Department into beginning to negotiate for bilateral working agreements. We took the information the State Department was giving us and said, okay, if we need legislation we will get that.

So I would just like to say that the tremendous effort needs to be recorded, the push.

Q: I can just see a State Magazine article coming out of this with a Joan Pryce statement on where the Skills Bank is today.

CHARD: It might be a good way to get some information: Who are the spouses? What are their qualifications? That was the thing, also, that struck me. I knew we were a qualified, well-educated group of people. But I could never have anticipated the wealth and the variety of skills. I would venture to guess that the spouses probably have more advanced degrees than even the employees. Because that is one avenue - since you couldn't work, you were able to pursue your studies, as a sideline. But I was even astonished. And I was a convinced person! (both laugh)

Q: What about this lovely file? Could that go to Georgetown some day, just as it is?

CHARD: There are letters that were sent to me that I would want to go through.

Q: It's so beautifully organized; with your personal things removed, it definitely could go to Georgetown in the special collections. [Some discussion about details of this process.]

CHARD: The Department began the negotiations for updating and institutionalizing the Skills Bank and computerizing it in September 1977. They even reported back to Congress that they were going to offer me a contract to do the Skills Bank. We got into negotiations and I was offered a contract I could not sign. The Department had failed, and it was Under Secretary for Management Ben Read's direction. Had I signed the contract, Ben Read and I personally, would have been held liable for violating the Privacy Act. I could not turn over a private project containing personal information on people without the necessary form to assure adherence to the Privacy Act provisions.

I was assured that that would be done, and at one point I was finally offered a contract. I questioned them on the matter just cited. It had not been done, and I said, "There's no way I can possibly sign this." I called Ben Read, shared my views, and said I was very sorry it had come to this. I never knew if the Department did this purposely or if it was an oversight. Those privacy provisions are so strict that they can hold people individually, personally liable. That had never been attended to, and I was not pleased that it arrived at that situation. I'm sure Ben Reed did not appreciate my telephone call. I would assume that he was aware of all this. I think the personal fine is up to \$10,000.

It was just crazy. As a result of that I may have been perceived as difficult within the Department and a contract was never offered. What I did receive was a letter from Janet Lloyd, Director of the newly established Family Liaison Office, stating that FLO would take over the files and give me \$3,000. My concern was that the Department was equating the skills of the spouses with \$3,000. I was quite upset and do have an official letter stating that under no circumstances was the Department to equate the \$3,000 with the effort of the Skills Bank, the many hours of time, effort and energy on the part of volunteers and all of the organizations involved, or with the spouses' skills in any way.

As I look back on all this, it was working with the Hill and the tremendous support of the volunteers who helped, and the people who supported and were cheering the project all along the way. But the negotiations with the Department were very difficult. But anyway, the Skills Bank is institutionalized, and I have the satisfaction of knowing that it was the basis for the funding for the Family Liaison Office.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Kenneth W. Chard

Spouse Entered Service: 1970 Left Service: Active Duty You Entered Service: Left Service:

Status: Spouse of FSO; also held Limited Appointment as first and only woman to serve as Commercial Officer in Algeria

Spouse's Position: Interfunctional

Place/Date of birth: Cheyenne, Wyoming; June 13, 1946

Maiden Name: Willson

Parents (Name, Profession):

Grant Hull Willson

Betty Jo Norcross

Schools (Prep, University): University of Colorado

Date/Place of Marriage: September 2, 1965, Greeley, Colorado

Volunteer and Paid Positions held: A. At Post: Benin: Director, American Embassy Association, Director American Language and Cultural Studies; USIA Guest Lecturer; Algeria: Coordinator Secretary of Commerce's Trade and Investment Mission; Commercial Officer.

B. In Washington, DC Creator/Director Skills/Talent Bank

Honors (Scholastic, FS related): 1977 - WAO's Award for most outstanding contribution to the Foreign Service; 1978 - Secretary of State's Commendation; 1985 - Sustained Superior Performance Award

End of interview